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THE MONIST

THE FIRST PHILOSOPHER.

DURING a recent sojourn among the treasures of the British Museum, it was the writer's good fortune to subject to close scrutiny an ancient stone,¹ the importance of which had hitherto been entirely unsuspected. It contains the oldest known philosophical explanation of the world, written a thousand years before the first Greek philosopher was born. It therefore, for the first time from any foreign, pre-Socratic source, furnishes tangible support to the Greek tradition of the origin of their philosophy in the East. A hasty glance at the monument, first in its general and then its more particular aspects, will doubtless serve to set it into its proper perspective before the eye of the modern reader.

"The History of the Human Mind," or something similar, will be the title of perhaps the most important book of the future. Modern experimental psychology, anthropology, physical and otherwise, archæology, study of modern and ancient literature, history, comparative religion,—in short, anthropological study in the widest conceivable sense, with its myriads of delvers, burrowing into a thousand far corners, is rapidly furnishing the material and the data for this coming book. Although a vast amount of work remains to be done upon all classes of materials, yet enough has been accomplished already to determine the main lines of a gradual evolution of the powers of the human mind through ages, as clear as the evolution of physical forms. It is the failure to rec-

ognise this fact which leads some good but misguided people, like many theosophists, to imagine that their idealised and purely subjective notion of early religions and ethical teaching is an actual, modern revival of lofty truths and precepts once held and practised in remote centuries before our era, for example in Egypt. A knowledge of even the simplest facts of the evolution of the human mind, a knowledge such as Browning shows in *Caliban*, would instantly reveal to such people the impossibility, not to say absurdity, of their assumption. Shall we, living as we do in these days of highly developed ethical consciousness and ripe religious culture, turn back the evolutionary process and revert to the embryonic ethics of a remote past? Such action would be as reasonable as the procedure of the man who, seeking cooling shade and refreshing fruit on a hot day, should go and sit under an acorn and eat watermelon seeds.

I fear that to the orthodox classical scholar these earlier stages of the human mind have little interest; for to him its history begins with the Greeks. But some of the important steps in this evolution, like the rise of the ethical consciousness, lie not merely back of the Greeks, but back of the age of writing, and must be studied in material remains, or in modern survivals of primitive culture. Only its subsequent developments can be studied in the literary age. But there is one fundamental step, which was taken far within the literary age, for which exclusive credit has hitherto been given to the Greeks. I refer to the development of the ability to contemplate the world philosophically. There is of course no question but that the effect of this momentous step upon the later world is due to the Greeks, whose genius was able to follow it up and develop an elaborate system of philosophy, which they bequeathed to modern Europe. But the Greeks themselves affirm that their philosophy was received from the East, especially Egypt. Modern criticism has for the most part rejected this tradition of the Greeks, nor has any document ever found in Egypt heretofore offered confirmation of this Greek tradition. It has therefore remained as the accepted fact that the human mind, after its ages of slow progress, first showed itself capable of a philosophical expla-

nation of the world in the seventh century B. C., and that this all-embracing conquest was the work of the Greeks.

The difficulty in investigating the Greek tradition of the Eastern origin of their philosophy has heretofore been insuperable. There was almost no material. Thought is an elusive thing, even when in writing, but when the said writing must survive through thousands of years, the chance of preservation is reduced to the vanishing-point. Out of the wreckage of millenia, it was recently the writer's good fortune to find in the British Museum a single chip, but bearing its message of thought from those centuries in Egypt, from which the Greeks themselves aver that they drew the beginnings of their philosophy. The monument was published two generations ago, in the days when little was known of hieroglyphic, and accurate study of epigraphy was unknown. The publication read and numbered the lines of the inscription backward, contained a multitude of errors, and failed to see so many of the fading glyphs faintly glimmering on the stone, that the few who have since then noticed the document as published, not perceiving the proper order of the lines, have naturally been unable to apprehend its remarkable content. The present writer, being at the time engaged in studying the Egyptian inscriptions of the British Museum for the Imperial Dictionary at Berlin, was fortunate enough to subject the stone itself to a searching examination of some ten days, during which he made first a rough copy, and then a careful scale copy.¹ Every tiniest fading scratch upon the stone was minutely examined over and over again, throwing the light upon it at varying angles from a mirror, and the copies were thus repeatedly checked and collated with the original. This work soon made clear the proper order of the lines and brought out many words and even whole sentences before unnoticed in the badly preserved places. The remarkable content of the document was then evident.

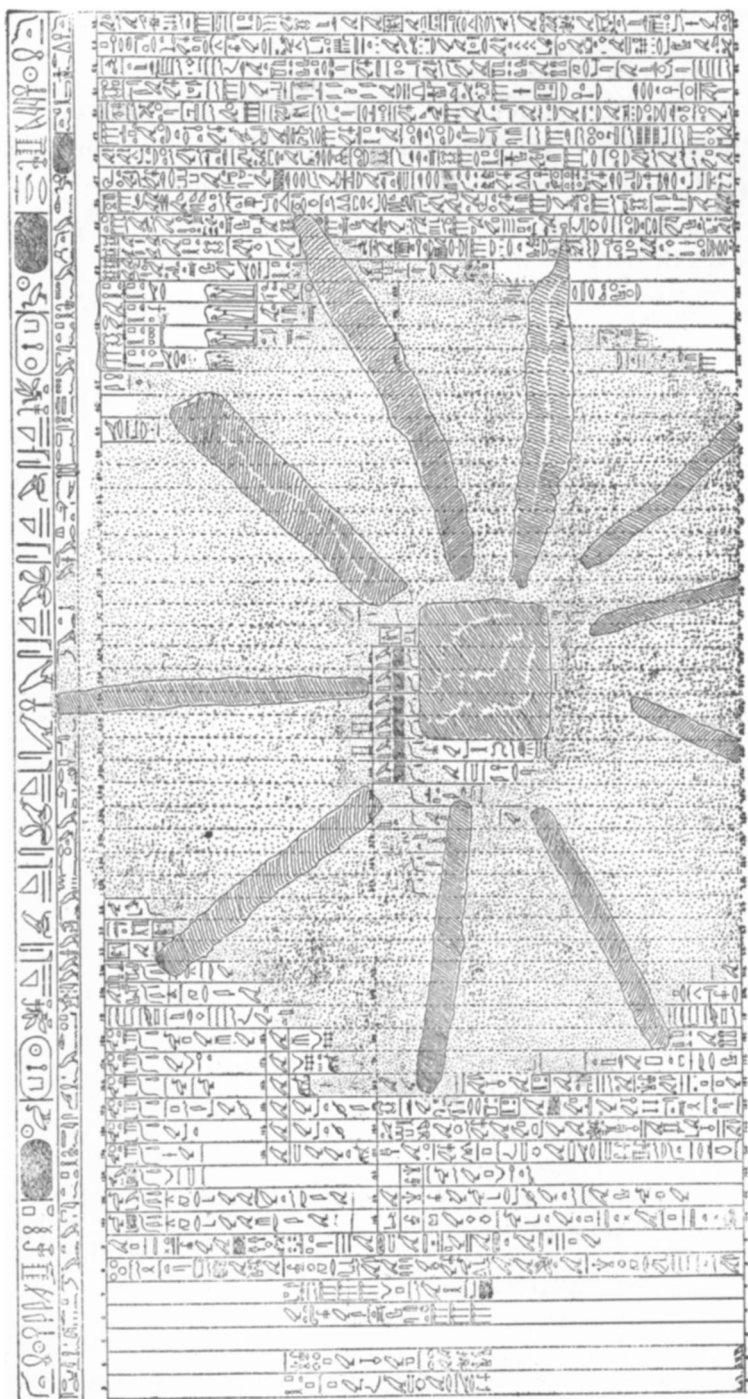
The monument is a rectangular slab of black granite, three

¹ This copy has appeared on a large scale, with critical exposition, in the *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache*, and will be published on a slightly smaller scale in a forthcoming number of *The Open Court*.

feet high by four and a half feet in length, as it stands upon the long edge. Set up in the temple of Ptah at Memphis, by King Shabaka, in the latter half of the eighth century B. C., it later suffered defacement by both political and religious fanaticism, and was finally removed by some vandal, who, cutting a large hole in the middle and rough channels radiating from the hole, employed it as a nether millstone. The middle portion of the inscription was thus totally obliterated, and the modern student finds about a fourth of it, in good preservation at each end, merging gradually into illegibility and then into bare emptiness, without the trace of a sign, as the eye moves from the end to the centre. In this uncertain border-land between the ends and the centre there is plenty of room for industry; days of painful scrutiny as the eye fastened on one spot vainly strives to wrest its secret from some passage of tantalising suggestiveness, till at last the missing signs are caught glimmering dimly from among the scratches left by that odious upper millstone. The inscription is in sixty-one vertical lines, surmounted by a superscription in two horizontal lines, the first of which contains the full name and titulary of Shabaka,¹ an Ethiopian king of Egypt in the second half of the eighth century B. C. The second line states that "his majesty wrote this document anew in the house of his father Ptah,² his majesty having discovered it, a work of the ancestors, eaten of worms; it was not legible from beginning to end. Then [he] wrote [this document] anew, more beautifully than the one that was before, in order that his name might abide, and his monument endure in the house of his father, Ptah, for all eternity." This superscription dates the monument with certainty, and avers that its inscription is only a renewal of an older document. This statement is confirmed both by the language, orthography and content of the inscription; indeed all the internal evidence would point to a date at least as old as the early eighteenth dynasty, the sixteenth century before Christ, and there are indications of even greater antiquity. As to its authorship,

¹ Usually identified, though with some uncertainty, with So, the ally of Hoshea of Israel (2 Kings xvii. 4).

² The god of Memphis.



there is no indication in the document. It is of course the product of the Memphite priesthood, for the temple of Ptah was located at Memphis, and the composition is doubtless the result of slow growth, rather than the work of one man.

In general the document is a disquisition on the god Ptah, toward the close of which is found the following hymn¹:

“ Ptah, the great, is the heart and tongue of the gods
 Ptah, from whom proceeded the power
 Of the heart,
 And of the tongue
 That which comes forth from everybody (thought)
 And from every mouth (speech)
 Of all gods, of all people, of all cattle, of all reptiles,
 That live, thinking and commanding
 Everything that he (Ptah) wills
 The gods fashioned the sight of the eyes,
 The hearing of the ears,
 The smelling of the nose,
 That these might furnish the desire of the heart.
 It (the heart) is the one that bringeth forth every successful issue.
 It is the tongue which repeats the thought of the heart ;
 It (the heart) was the fashioner of all gods
 At a time when every divine word
 Came into existence by the thought of the heart,
 And the command of the tongue
 It (the heart) is the maker
 Of that which is loved,
 And that which is hated ;
 It is the giver of life to the innocent,
 The giver of death to the guilty.
 It is the maker of all handiwork,
 And of every handicraft.
 The doing of the hands,
 The going of the feet,
 The movement of every member
 Is according to its (the heart's) command,
 The expression of the heart's thought,
 That cometh forth from the tongue,

¹ A number of theological references have been omitted in the following translation. A full translation of the document will be found at the end (pp. 333-336).

And doeth the totality of everything
 Everything has come forth from him (Ptah),
 Whether offering, or food, or divine oblation,
 Or any good thing
 He formed the gods,
 He made the cities,
 He equipped the nomes,
 He set the gods in their adyta (holy places),
 He made their offerings flourish,
 He equipped their adyta,
 He made likenesses of their bodies,
 To the satisfaction of their hearts,
 So that the gods might enter into their bodies.
 Of every wood,
 Of every costly stone,
 Of every metal,
 Of every substance."

It will be evident to the reader that the word "heart" in the above extract is used for "mind," while "tongue" designates the expression of the mind's content in language. That two such concrete terms should be used to indicate abstract conceptions is entirely Egyptian and common enough almost anywhere. Understanding these two terms, we see that the above composition is a hymn in praise of mind, with occasional reference to Ptah, with whom mind is identified,—a hymn which reminds us of the lofty didactic poems, in which some of the pre-Socratic philosophers, like Empedocles, were wont to set forth their systems. The system which our hymn proclaims is, for an age so remote, marvelously rational. The source of all things is mind, wherein all things originate as thought, and the efficient force by which these thoughts become objective realities, is speech. This notion of the efficacy of the spoken thought is one suggested to our Memphite philosophers by the use of the spoken word, always so efficacious in Egyptian magic. The use of the efficacious word in creation has long been known, as found in Egyptian theology. It has been especially treated by Maspero (*Bib. égyptologique*, II., pp. 373-380), who thinks the use of an unintelligible vocable by the god (as in a late Greek papyrus) is a *higher* form of creation. This is clearly

disproved by our text which makes the tongue the agent for the expression of *thought* in each case of creation. Such use of the tongue is unquestionably higher than the utterance of unintelligible, magical hodge-podge. Maspero says: "Au début, le créateur avait parlé le monde, plus tard il le sonna: il lui restait encore à le penser, mais c'est là une conception à laquelle les théologiens de l'Égypte ne paraissent pas avoir songé." It is just the prominence throughout our Memphite philosopher's system of the god's initial *thought*, which makes it new and gives his uttered fiat the dignity and loftiness of the biblical cosmogony, with its simple means: "And God said."

These two things: mind and its efficient force, speech, are identical with the god Ptah. The world then—I would not venture to say universe—is the product of the god's thought and speech. All the sentient beings in that world, viz., gods, men, and beasts,¹ (*sic!*) owe mind and speech at creation, as well as all the daily ideas which they act upon and carry out, to the god. They think and carry out that which Ptah wills. The gods are recognised as a kind of beings superior to men, and as Ptah is both their mind and their efficient force, they are, as it were, merely vehicles of Ptah, forms of him, or a kind of composite personality which is Ptah. Their only productive act in creation was that of furnishing to mind its means of receiving impressions from the objective world, viz., the senses, which "gratify the desires of the heart." There is no clear consciousness of the metaphysical problem,—no attempt to define mind or to distinguish it from matter. For matter itself, indeed, is unconsciously assumed, or if thought of at all, is conceived only in the finished forms, which are the realisation of the god's ideas.

The most remarkable feature of all this is the characterisation of the god as the mind in everything, whether gods, men, or beasts, and reminds one of Thales's statement, that "all is full of gods." This was an idea, as far as man is concerned, of which there is evidence in Egypt, outside of our document. Under King Thoth-

¹ Democritus ascribed reason and soul to all, even inanimate things.

mes III., the greatest of the Egyptian conquerors (sixteenth century B. C.), the court herald Intef says on his tombstone in the Louvre: "It was my heart which caused that I should do them (his services to the king), by its guidance of my affairs. . . . I did not transgress its speech, I feared to overstep its guidance; I prospered on this account exceedingly. I was distinguished by reason of that which it caused that I should do; I was successful through its guidance. 'Lo,' said the people, 'it is an oracle of the god which is in every body; prosperous is he whom it hath guided to the propitious way of achievement.' Behold, thus I was."

It is this teaching which justifies the statement that "everything (not excepting the works of his creatures) came forth from him," for every creature is but a manifestation and vehicle of the all-pervasive divine mind. Finally it is to be noted that this sway of Ptah is strongly ethical, rewarding virtue and punishing vice.

In estimating this Memphite system it must be clearly understood that our philosopher has tried to interweave his philosophical conceptions with the existent Egyptian mythology and pantheon. Of course, the original Ptah had in the minds of his priests no more connection with such philosophical notions, than had the early Greek gods with the later philosophical interpretation of their functions and relations, already beginning as early as the pre-Socratic thinkers, whose manner of thinking forms a parallel to the interpretation of Ptah in our inscription; a parallel which becomes much closer in post-Christian times. And just as, to the Greek mind, the philosophical interpretation of a god was often suggested by his place or function in mythic story, so in our Memphite system. Ptah had been from the remotest ages the god of the architect and craftsman, to whom he furnished plans and designs. Contemplating this god, the Memphite priest, little used as his mind was to abstractions, found a tangible line, moving along which he gradually gained his philosophical conception of the world. The workshop of the Memphite temple, where under Ptah's guidance were wrought the splendid statues, utensils, and offerings for the temple service, expands into a world, and Ptah, its lord, grows into the master-workman of the universal workshop.

This is clear from the fact that our inscription actually regards the world more as a vast temple workshop and domain, producing offerings and utensils for the gods under the guidance of Ptah. Like some thinkers of the present day, our Memphite priest cannot get away from his ecclesiastical point of view. But this *origin* of the Memphite system in the mythic god and the admixture of other mythic divinities does not deprive the *finished system* of its character as a philosophy, adequately explaining the world as our priest saw it. His doctrine of the ideal world stands of itself, and is stated more than once in entire independence of the mythic divinities and elements, which he also employs. It must furthermore not be forgotten that the earliest of the Greek thinkers were forced to similar recourse to mythic elements. Thus the first Greek philosopher, Thales, assuming water as his primal element, is unable to explain the cause of the rise of things from water. "He probably thought that the efficient force was directly combined with matter, and conceived this force in the spirit of the old nature-religion as analogous to living forces, as is seen in the assertion that "all is full of gods." Even the later pre-Socratic philosophers, like Empedocles, were likewise compelled to "annex moving forces to the elements *in a mythical form*." The only superiority of such philosophers over our Egyptian lay in the fact that their systems did not *originate* in the myth, but merely had recourse to it in the last steps. They began with matter and failed to arrive at one controlling mind; our Egyptian began with such a mind and never arrived at matter, in the Greek sense. But his conception of the function of mind and idea in a philosophical system is so clear and so high that it is *even modern* in its superiority over those strange objective "ideas" of Plato.

This is not the place to examine the genuineness nor the sources of the Greek tradition of the Eastern origin of their philosophy. Suffice it to say that it exists, and is defended as true by able and reputable modern students of the history of philosophy, like R  th and Gladisch.

I should be the last to imagine that any of the great systems of philosophy among the Greeks was as a whole transmitted thither

from Egypt. But it is now clear that valuable philosophical beginnings, denied and heretofore justly denied to Egypt by most historians of philosophy, existed in Egypt a thousand years before the first Greek philosopher was born. The objection to the origin of Greek philosophy in Egypt on the ground that no such material is to be found there, now falls away. The former opinion of archæologists regarding the sources of Greek art, is strikingly analogous to the present prevailing opinion of philosophers concerning the origins of Greek thought.

Winckelmann and all the early archæologists until two generations ago¹ maintained that the *art* of Greece was, both in its *origin* and in its development, solely the product of Greek genius. But the spade of the excavator and the studies of the archæologist during the last seventy-five years, have clearly demonstrated that while the *development* of Greek art and the exalted *ideas* of which it became the superb vehicle, are indeed solely the product of Greek hearts and hands; nevertheless the *origin* of many of the fundamental elements, so nobly employed by the Greeks, is far earlier in date and belongs to the civilisation of the East, especially Egypt. It remained for Greece, having received a great artistic inheritance from the East,² to assimilate its elements, to combine, to diversify, to enrich, to develop, and at last to employ them in the expression of ideals of beauty, which had never dawned upon the vision of the East. Thus it has become clear, that in art at least, Greece can no longer be cut off and isolated from the earlier past of the race. Again, the archæologists from the first perceived that the art of Rome was an inheritance from Greece, yet they did not draw a now obvious analogy, and conclude that likewise the art of Greece, in its turn, owed much to earlier civilisation. Roman philosophy was

¹ Down to Otfried Müller, who published his *Handbuch der Archäologie der Kunst* in 1835.

² I am aware that of late the classical archæologists are explaining the remarkable rapid development of Greek art in the sixth and fifth centuries by the influences surviving from Mycenæan civilisation. This however does not affect the established fact of the strong influence of Egypt noticeable in the earliest historic art of Greece, at a time, be it noted, when her intercourse with Egypt first became close and intimate.

likewise an adoption of Greek systems. Shall we like our fathers fail to draw the obvious analogy? Was art so isolated a fruit of Greek life, that, while admitting that it strikes its roots deep into the civilisation of the East, the other branches of the splendid tree must be excepted? There is not space here to note the elements in the Memphite philosopher's system, which, assimilated by the ready mind of the Greek, might have become pregnant seeds, ready to germinate and in that incomparable soil, to burst into the richest fruitage. Such potential germs, as our Memphite's "divine word," might easily have been of powerful suggestiveness for the later Greek notion of *nous* and *logos*. Again our philosopher's single, all pervasive mind, governing by thought, might easily have been the hint to Xenophanes in affirming the existence of but one god, "neither comparable to mortals in shape, nor in thoughts," 'all eye, all ear, all thought,' 'who without trouble, by his thought, governs all things.'" Similar comparisons will suggest themselves even to the casual reader of Greek philosophy. But probably enough has been said to show what it has been the writer's purpose to emphasise throughout, viz., that the rise of European civilisation is by no means as abrupt as it has seemed, and that the transition from the civilisation of the East to that of the Greek archipelago and peninsula was a very gradual one, a long period, which was neither the end of one nor the beginning of the other. During this long transition period, the Greeks assimilated not merely material forms in art, mechanical processes, customs, an alphabet, etc., from the East, but also some of its thought. That that thought was of a character to furnish a basis for the earlier philosophy of the Greeks, our document plainly shows. Moreover we must not forget, that while a part only of one such monument has survived, there must have been many on more perishable material which have passed away. Such thinking as our document exhibits was not confined to one stone slab; but elaborated and committed to papyrus must have been a common possession of the priesthoods of Memphis, Heliopolis, and the other great religious centres of Egypt, particularly those in the neighboring Delta, the region where Greeks were numerous residents from the seventh century

B. C. Under these circumstances, it would be almost a matter of course that the fundamental ideas of priestly thinking should reach Greece. Thus the Greeks, however great their genius, like every other people, are not to be cut off from their predecessors. In all the elements of life, they must have received their inheritance as all other peoples have done; and they bequeathed it to the later world, enriched as no legacy has ever been enriched by any other people.¹

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT.

[The following translation contains all that is to be made out with certainty. A few obscure phrases are omitted, as well as the fragments around the left edge of the worn circle, which are too disconnected for rendering. The first two lines contain the superscription as given above (p. 324), and the text itself begins with line 3.]

(3) This Ptah is he, who is proclaimed under this great name.
 (4) The Southland and the Northland are this Uniter, who appears as King of Lower Egypt. [(5) left blank]. (6) He that begat him is Atum, who formed the Nine Gods, (7) to whom the gods offered when he had judged Horus and Set. (8) He defended their litigation, in that he set up Set as King of Upper Egypt in the Southland, from the place where he was born, Sese (?); whereas Keb, he set Horus as King of Lower Egypt in the Northland, from the place where his father was drowned; (9) at the division of the Two Lands. It is Horus and Set who stood on the ground (?); they joined the Two Lands at Enu (?); it is the boundary of the Two Lands.

(10a) Keb (to) Set, speech; "Hasten from the place, wherein thou wast born."

(11a) Keb (to) Horus, speech: "Hasten from the place wherein thy father was drowned."

¹ I need hardly add that the above essay intentionally ignores the really philosophical systems found in Indian and Chinese theologies, etc. This has been done, because such systems have remained totally isolated and without connection with Greek or modern civilisation. Moreover they are vastly later than the Egyptian system presented above.

(12a) Keb (to) Horus and Set, speech: "I will judge you."

(13a-17a) Keb (to) the gods: "I have assigned the inheritance to that heir, to the son of the first-born son."

(10b) (To) Set the Southland! It is evil to the heart of Keb, that the portion of Horus should be (only) equal to the portion of Set.

(11b) (to) Horus the Northland! It is Keb, who gives his inheritance to Horus, he being the son (12b) of his first-born son.

(13c) Horus stands on the earth, he is the uniter of this land, proclaimed under the great name, "Totenen south of his wall," lord of eternity. (14c) The double crown flourishes on his head; he is Horus, appearing as King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Uniter of the Two Lands at the stronghold, at the place where the Two Lands are united. (15c) Now when the — (?) and the column were at the front of the house of Ptah, Horus and Set were united, joined, they became brothers, they no longer strove together. (16c) united in the House of Ptah, in the place wherein the Southland and the Northland join (?); it is this land. (Broken references to the Osiris-myth follow, and then comes the great central lacuna.)

.....

(48) Ptah is the Being of the gods (??)

(49a) Ptah upon the Great Throne is.....

(49b)fashioner of the gods.

(50a) Ptah-Nun is the father of Atum.

(50b)fashioner of the gods.

(51a) Ptah-Nekhabet is the mother who bore Atum.

(51b)

(52a) Ptah the Great is the heart and the tongue of the gods.

(52b)at the nose of Re every day.

(53) He that became heart, and he that became tongue are an emanation of Atumtheir Ka's being this heart and this tongue.

(54) Horus came into existence through him, Thoth came into existence through him, through Ptah, from whom proceeded the power of the heart and the tongue He is the one who makes to

[lost causative verb] that which comes forth from every body (thought), and from every mouth (speech), of all gods, of all people, of all cattle, of all reptiles, which live, thinking and commanding [lit., "commanding the word of everything....] everything that he wills.

(55) His Ennead is before him, being the teeth and the lips, the phallus and the hands of Atum.... (For) the Ennead of Atum came into existence from his phallus and his fingers; the Ennead indeed being the teeth and the lips in this mouth, which proclaims the name of everything; and from which Shu and Tefnut came forth.

(56) The gods fashioned the sight of the eyes, the hearing of the ears, and the smelling of the nose, that they might furnish the desire of the heart. It (the heart) is the one that bringeth forth every successful issue. It is the tongue which repeats the thought of the heart; it (the heart) is the fashioner of all gods, at the time when every divine word even, came into existence by the thought (57) of the heart, and command of the tongue. It (the heart) is the maker of Ka's.... the maker of every food-offering and every oblation, by this word, the maker of that which is loved and that which is hated; it is the giver of life to him who bears peace (the innocent), the giver of death to him who bears guilt. It (the heart) is the maker of all handiwork, and of every handicraft, the doing of the hands, the going of the feet; the movement of every member is according to its command (viz.,) the expression (lit. "word") of the heart's thought, that cometh forth from the tongue and doeth the totality of everything..... Ptah-Totenen, he being the fashioner of the gods; everything has come forth from him, whether offering or food or (59) divine oblation, or any good thing.

He is Thoth, the Wise; greater is his strength than (that of the gods. He united with Ptah after he had made all things, every divine word; when he formed the gods, made the towns, equipped the nomes, placed the gods in their adyta, (60) made their offerings flourish, equipped their adyta, made likenesses of their bodies to the satisfaction of their hearts; then the gods entered into their bodies, of every wood, of every costly stone, of every metal (?),

and everything, that grows upon his....(?) (61) from which they come. It is he to whom all the gods sacrifice, their Ka's being united, associated with the Lord of the Two Lands. The divine storehouse of Totenen is the Great Seat attached to the heart of the gods who are in the house of Ptah, lord of life, lord....wherein the life of the Two Lands is made.

(62)¹ Osiris, he was drowned in his water; Isis and Nephthys saw; when they beheld him, they were of service to him. Horus gave command to Isis and Nephthys in Dedu, that they should save Osiris, and that they should prevent that he drown. (63) They went around....(?), they brought him to the land, he entered his secret structure in....of the lords of eternity, at the footsteps of him who rises in the horizon upon the highways of Re in the Great Seat. (64) He associates with the court, he becomes a brother to the gods.

Totenen-Ptah, lord of years, he hath become Osiris in the land, in....on the north side of this land. His son Horus comes to him, appearing as King of Upper Egypt, appearing as King of Lower Egypt, in the presence of his father, Osiris and the gods, his ancestors, who are behind him.

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¹ The *n* at the head of the line may be the negative as at the head of the duplicate line (19), so that we could render: "Osiris was *not* drowned in his water." The statements in ll. 8 and 11a, that he *was* drowned, would then probably indicate that he was merely nearly drowned.